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Designing a National Security Strategy:
A Memorandum for the President

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"While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges nor fail to seize the opportunities of this new world. Together with our friends and allies we will work to shape change lest it engulf us. When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary.

"The brave Americans serving our nation today in the Persian Gulf and Somalia, and wherever else they stand, are testament to our resolve.

"But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world we see them embraced and we rejoice. Our hopes, our hearts, our hands are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause."

President Bill Clinton
Inaugural Address
20 January 1993

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
FROM: National Security Adviser
SUBJECT: National Security Strategy

With the collapse of communist power during the Bush administration years, the American public was subjected to much talk of a "new world order," particularly as this new world order allegedly manifested itself in the international diplomatic and military cooperation over the Persian Gulf crisis. Since at least 1991, however, it has been clear that there is in fact no order at all in this new post-communist world. Old, intractable conflicts remain and new or long-buried antagonisms stifled by communist dictatorships have resurfaced in bloody ways. The world faces not a new order, but new anarchy.

For the United States, this situation poses opportunities as well as a dilemma. We need no longer fear a Soviet communist threat to our survival, through either nuclear attack or diplomatic and political competition. We have more freedom to make proactive rather than reactive, strictly anticommunist, foreign policy decisions. On the other hand, we can no longer rely on the communist threat to help limit and ease our foreign policy choices. We must now reevaluate our national interests and begin to design a new conceptual framework for our national security strategy, one that helps shape a new world order consistent with our interests and values. As you stated in your inaugural address, we must "work

to shape change lest it engulf us."

This memorandum will offer some preliminary thoughts on how we should define our national interests in this decade and what sorts of changes in international rules and institutions could help meet those interests. It will also lay out some examples of the types of difficulties the suggested changes could present.

National Interests in the 1990's

It is generally agreed that all nations share certain broad categories of national interests: survival, economic welfare and prosperity, preservation of the national value system at home, and projection of national values overseas. In prioritizing those interests, national survival is naturally paramount. Moreover, for the United States during the Cold War, national survival was believed to be under serious threat from the Soviet Union. Thus when other categories of national interest appeared to clash with policies dictated by the national survival interest, those secondary interests were invariably ignored or deemphasized.

Today, while national survival must remain the highest priority among our national interests, it faces virtually no threat from abroad. Our economic welfare and prosperity, on the other hand, are generally agreed to be gravely threatened. It is this national interest -- and the threat to it -- that the American public believed the Bush administration was ignoring and was largely responsible for your election victory. Clearly, you have already decided that restoration of America's economic vitality will be this administration's top priority. I would argue that the

national interest in projecting our values abroad can not only support our quest for economic security, but that our long-term economic security will not be possible without our successfully projecting our values abroad. This seemingly idealistic interest is in fact a matter of clear-eyed realism. You acknowledged the importance of values projection in your inaugural address in declaring: "When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary."

What are these values that we should project? First, democracy, with all that implies regarding human rights, protection of minority rights, and resolution of internal disputes by negotiation and compromise rather than by force of arms. Second, the development of some variant of free-market capitalism.

Why does it matter to the United States that other countries adopt our values? Experience shows us that certain minimum standards of democracy/political participation and capitalism are the only guarantee of stable governments and economic prosperity.¹ The United States requires a politically stable, economically prosperous world to ensure its own economic viability. We are increasingly less self-sufficient economically; up to 20% of our GDP is now dependent on our exports, and that percentage is

¹ China is an apparent exception to this rule, but one could argue that its current economic growth and prosperity will be highly destabilizing to the totalitarian/authoritarian political order and that when the current leadership dies, big political changes will occur.

growing. Imports, especially of vital materials such as oil, are also increasing, and we saw clearly in 1990-91 how access to oil is threatened by a nondemocratic government -- and how expensive it is to secure such access in the face of aggression.² Our economic growth is and will be highly dependent on our ability both to maintain trade with our European and Asian partners and to expand it to new markets. Our European allies, in turn, will not remain good markets if their political and economic stability and health are threatened by massive refugee flows from their poorer neighbors in Eastern Europe, Russia and North Africa. Those poor neighbors and other poor nations will not be able to offer us lucrative new markets if they cannot establish stable democratic governments and economic prosperity based on free market principles.

Finally, let us not forget that truly democratic nations -- so far -- do not wage wars on each other. The spread of democracy to such growing economic and military powers as China is thus in the long term supportive of our always paramount national interest in survival.

The Role of International Law and Institutions

If we accept the premise that the spread of democracy and capitalism provide the critical underpinning for our vital national interests in survival and economic well-being, how should we go about implementing a "values-based" policy? First, we must

² One could argue that all Middle East oil producers -- even our allies -- are inherently unstable because they are authoritarian and that we should therefore make the development of alternative energy sources a top economic priority. But that's another memo.

recognize that the notion of the United States unilaterally imposing democratic values on other nations is both impractical and contradicts the very values we espouse. Moreover, most governments that do not share our values have what they perceive as good reasons for not doing so. To some extent, we can lead by example and through bilateral pressures, but these avenues will have their limits. We cannot conduct a lonely strong-arm crusade, but must instead aggressively pursue multilateral efforts conducive to our goals. This means, first and foremost, strengthening and making increased use of the most inclusive international organization, the United Nations.

In the short term, we must pay our dues arrearage, vigorously pursue UN management reform, help craft new rules concerning UN peace enforcement and preventive deployments, and actively consider ways to reconfigure the Security Council.³ Finally, along with many observers, I believe that the international community as represented by the UN must consider an eventual change in the 350-year-old notion of national sovereignty. In a world as interdependent as ours, both morality and pragmatism dictate that the international community set certain minimum standards of treatment of populations by sovereign governments and provide the means to enforce those standards, when it can do so effectively. The American public may react emotionally to the human tragedies

³ The UNSC must somehow accommodate Japan and Germany if it expects them to carry their weight politically and financially, and it must accommodate the sensitivities of the largest Third World countries if the poorer nations are to be asked to cooperate in building a "new world order."

of, say, a Bosnia Herzogovina. Such flagrant human rights abuses, however, are not merely morally repugnant; they also pose grave threats to the stability of the Balkan region, the rest of Eastern Europe, and potentially to NATO cohesion and West European governments. In such cases, the international community must have both the recognized right and the means to intervene in "domestic" disputes.

The difficulty of changing the concept of national sovereignty should not be underestimated. Even many of our allies, not to mention U.S. conservatives, would stoutly resist such a change. It should therefore be viewed as a long-term goal and accepted that practice will outrun theory on this question. The Somalia intervention has already provided a useful precedent, as have the imposition of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq.

For the United States, conforming to the constraints imposed by multilateralism and a stronger UN system will not be easy. We, too, could be asked to surrender some of our national sovereignty. For example, it would be logical for other countries to assume that we would recognize the jurisdiction, and abide by the judgments, of the International Court of Justice. We would also potentially face the need to place U.S. military forces under a foreign command for peacekeeping or peace enforcing purposes. As long as the United States remains a credible democracy that protects the rights and freedoms of minorities and provides economic opportunities for its population, however, there would be no reason to fear any threat to our vital interests or survival under a modified concept of

sovereignty.

Merging the Real With the Ideal

The idea that the world can be transformed into a happy family of free-trading, peace-loving, liberal democracies is, of course, fanciful at best. Neither your administration nor any other will achieve such an international Utopia. This Utopia, however, is both laudable and useful as a goal and a vision that can help us set priorities and attempt to maintain a steady path in foreign policy.

The difficulty will arise when our idealistic interests in a particular country or trouble spot collide with our pragmatic interests -- or when two idealistic interests contradict each other. Examples come easily to mind:

-- We would like to see China improve its human rights record and will therefore be tempted to lean on its government to do so. On the other hand, we need to ensure that China does not exercise its veto against us at the UNSC; we would also like to persuade it not to sell missile technology to Iran or Syria.

-- We would like Turkey to improve its human rights record. At the same time, we need Turkey's continued support for Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq.

-- We would like international support for our enforcement of UN sanctions against Iraq. Meanwhile, we have always prevented sanctions against our ally Israel for flouting UN resolutions.

In all of the above cases and many others, we will have to make "impure" decisions involving complex and messy calculations of

our interests. We must consider not only the relative weight of our interests, but also the probability of effectively influencing events in our favor. We will often judge that quiet diplomacy will be more effective than public scolding, economic sanctions or military force -- and will thus expose ourselves to accusations of double standards from purists on both the left and the right.

If, however, we consistently at least consider values-based issues when making foreign policy decisions, we will perforce increase their importance and influence internationally. We will find ways to reward governments that move toward democracy and force foreign governments that seek our favor to consider improving human rights standards as a way to achieve their goals. We will thus achieve incremental improvement in the areas of human rights, freedom, and economic development, thereby making the world safer for ourselves.

In 1993, democracy is the only credible ideology. The whole world has seen communism fail. Iran, Sudan, and Pakistan will provide convincing examples of the inability of Islamic fundamentalism to meet the aspirations of their populations. More people around the world are more receptive to democracy and capitalism than ever before. Now is the time to act.

The Clinton Doctrine, combining the revitalization of America's economy at home with support for democracy and capitalism abroad, will both maintain our place in the world and leave that world a better place for future generations.